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ABSTRACT

Neither of the two major forensics associations uses an ideal point system for the team sweepstakes award at debate tournaments. The National Forensics Association (NFA) awards points for preliminary round ballots and uses a 3-tiered system of team awards based on entry size. They restrict preliminary round sweepstakes points by capping the total number of students who can contribute points to each team. Point values for elimination rounds are higher than for preliminaries. The American Forensics Association (AFA) awards sweepstakes points only in elimination rounds, but between rounds there is no difference in the number of points awarded for each place (e.g., first place in both the quarterfinals and finals is worth 6 points). The AFA also differs from the NFA in that it has one division of sweepstakes. A compromise between the NFA and the AFA's scoring formulas would result in a fairer system of awarding the sweepstakes. First, give one point for first place in preliminary rounds, but limit the number of entries that count towards the sweepstakes in preliminaries. Points for places should increase as the level of competition increases. Finally, allow only one division of sweepstakes. With modifications, the sweepstakes award could truly reflect team performance. (SRT)

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SWEEPSTAKES AS A TEAM AWARD: MYTH OR REALITY?

A Comparison of NFA and AFA Methods for Tabulating Sweepstakes Points at National Tournaments

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SWEEPSTAKES AS A TEAM AWARD: MYTH OR REALITY?

Team sweepstakes is one of the most prestigious awards given at forensics tournaments. It is usually given at the culmination of the awards ceremony and in our District it is customary for the first place team to receive a standing ovation. The fanfare given to this award, as well as the time and effort which goes into tabulating it, suggests its importance to forensics participants, coaches, and judges. But is it truly a team award? Does it reward the group effort?

Most tournament directors tabulate the sweepstakes without considering the implications of how or why the award is given. Thus, tabulation methods vary greatly between invitational tournaments and even the national tournaments. This difference varies from counting preliminary round ballots for sweepstakes, to placing caps on entries which can be counted, and even the point values given for final placement. Upon examining the differences in these tabluation methods at invitational tournaments I found they reflect two different philosophies which parallel either the American Forensic Association or the National Forensic Association. I believe the forensics community needs to examine the current methods used for tabulating sweepstakes. In this paper I will examine the purpose of the sweepstakes award and make a comparison between the two methods used at the American Forensic Association National Individual Events Tournament and the National Forensic Association Individual Event Nationals. My purpose is to demonstrate that neither organization currently gives a sweepstakes award that represents the ideal <u>team</u> award.

The Purpose of a Team Sweepstakes Award

I believe team sweepstakes originates from a need to recognize both individual speakers and the whole team effort. It would follow then, that these two awards should be different from each other. While individuals work to meet their own goals, the team award serves to challenge students to work together as a group. It is educationally sound for forensics to stress more than just the individual's desire to win trophies. It is equally important to urge students to work together toward a common team goal. I think the ideal sweepstakes award should reward this dual effort.

While some suggest there is no need for a "team" award at "individual" event tournaments I think there are many advantages for this team award. From a coaching standpoint the sweepstakes award motivates beginning students. Even though they may not break into final rounds it gives them pride to know they have contributed toward a team award. As such, the award promotes team cameraderie and cohesion. From a practical standpoint team sweepstakes can be useful in comparing programs on a national or regional level. Programs which rely on student funds find it necessary to use overall team placement as a rationale for increased or sustained funding.

Ideally, I believe the team sweepstakes award should represent a good mix of quality competitors and quantity or depth on a team. A good team is more than just a few "stars". It has at its foundation a group of individuals which may not break to final rounds but still rank consistently in the upper half of the round. When sweepstakes honors this kind of team, the award is worthy of prestige and admiration. Unfortunately, I think current methods of tabulating this award are in dire need of revision. Let us compare the tabulation methods and their philosophical underpinnings at the AFA and NFA national tournaments.

Tabulation Methods at the NFA National Tournament

The NFA philosophy of sweepstakes tabulation is characterized by awarding points for preliminary round ballots and using a three tiered system of team awards based on entry size. Let us examine each of these concepts. The National Forensic Association sets itself apart from American Forensic Association by awarding of points for preliminary round ballots. Chris Reynolds, Executive Secretary of NFA explains the organization's rationale for this procedure.

> "Sweepstakes points are given in preliminary rounds to acknowledge the efforts of those students on a team who may not reach out rounds, but who have contributed through their competition to the whole team's effort. Thus, the sweepstakes award can reflect the quality and depth of a program."

The procedure for awarding points in preliminary rounds is delineated in the NFA Constitution, Article VIII, Section 5. It states, "contestants earn three sweepstakes points for each first place; 2 points for each second place; and 1 point for each third place ballot received in four preliminary rounds. Thus, the maximum points would occur when a contestant received 8 firsts equaling 24 points." (Mitch Fay was the only student in the 1986 tournament to earn the maximum number of points possible in preliminaries.) It should also be noted that even though the lowest rank and rating are dropped at the end of preliminary rounds this does not affect sweepstakes.

While awarding sweepstakes points for preliminary rounds the organization imposes two restrictions on these points. First, after preliminary round points are figured the total is halved. According to Reynolds, "this is done to compensate for having two judges in each round." I believe this is a sound practice because it equalizes the number of points which can be earned for preliminary rounds compared to elimination rounds. Currently a student earning the maximum points for preliminary rounds would contribute 12 points

(24 points divided in half). If they went on to place first in the tournament in that event they could earn 18 sweepstakes points from elimination rounds (12 points for first place, 3 points for semi-finals, and 3 points for quarter-finals). If points were not halved a student could potentially earn more points in preliminary rounds where competition is easier than they could accumulate in out rounds where competition is tougher. I think it is necessary to maintain this ratio between points earned for preliminary rounds and elimination rounds.

The point values for elimination rounds are as follows:

1st place - 12 points
2nd place - 10 points
3rd place - 8 points
4th place - 7 points
5th place - 5 points
6th place - 3 points

At the 1986 national tournament the points awarded for quarterfinalist and semifinalist were changed. All contestants in quarter final and semi final rounds now receive three sweepstakes points.

The second method NFA uses to restrict preliminary round sweepstakes points is by capping the number of students which can contribute points for the team award. As specified in the NFA Constitution, "the total points a school could accumulate for preliminaries are restricted to the top three contestants in each event." Thus, if three students receive the maximum points in each event a school could earn up to 72 points maximum in any <u>one</u> event (24 points x 3 contestants). In the 1986 tournament no school earned the maximum of 72 points in any one event. Bradley came the closest by earning 66 points in preliminary rounds of Prose Interpretation.

This cap on entries which can be counted for sweepstakes is presumed to give schools with small entries a chance to compete with larger entries. Thus, it would discourage teams from accumulating lots of sweepstakes points

by entering sheer numbers into the tournament. It theoretically insures quality and not just quantity. But is this true in practice? It's important to remember that a third place rank in preliminary rounds still earns one sweepstakes point. If a school had three contestants in each event and they all went straight rank of three throughout preliminaries they would still accumulate 108 points (8x3)x9 divided by 2). Without any additional point from elimination rounds, this would be good enough to place third in President's Division I (in 1986 this was 13-33 entries). It is for this reason I believe schools with quantity over quality have the advantage at NFA.

While I like the concept of capping entries to give small entries a chance I'm not sure it accomplishes the intended goal. The capping of entries coupled with the NFA policy of a three tiered system of sweepstakes based on entry size may prove detrimental to the small school. For example, a small school with a total of 18 entries at the tournament may not get to count all of those entries if they have more than three in any one event. Since it would be quite common to have five or six entries in the popular events like Prose, a small school could have a large portion of their entry unable to count for sweepstakes. The small school with 18 entries would be wise to enter three people in at least six different events if they wish to be competitive. Since sweepstakes divisions are established by entry size why do you need to place a cap on entries?

In addition to awarding points for preliminary round ballots NFA also uses a three tiered system of sweepstakes awards. It awards first through tenth place in 3 categories: Open, President's I and President's II. There are a total of 30 sweepstakes awards. Approximately 25% of the schools at the 1986 tournament received a team award. The divisions are explained in the

Constitution Bylaws VI.

> The first 15% of schools with the most entered slots are eligible only for open sweepstakes; the next twenty percent are eligible for President's I; and the remainder for President's II. Categories are determined the Sunday before Nationals. All will be rounded down. A school can win in more than one category.

Chris Reynolds, Executive Secretary, explains the how the idea originated:

> "The three tiered system grew from the wide range of schools and programs (entry sizes) that attend NFA. Seventy percent of schools attending from year to year enter 20 or less slots. Nine to eleven percent enter over 40 slots. This system recognizes schools that perform very well but can never hope to compete in open sweepstakes against larger schools.

While NFA has an elaborate formula for placing schools in a sweepstakes division, the question is whether or not it is appropriate or necessary for schools to compete only with others of their own entry size on the national tournament level. This is never done during the regular year at invitational tournaments. Since contestants must qualify to attend the national tournament in the first place, I do not think the sweepstakes divisions are necessary. It should also be noted here that schools do not have to bring all students that are qualified for this tournament. They can and do pare down their entry. My own school is a prime example. We have 60 plus students active in our Forensics Program but sent only two students to the national tournament. Those two students did well enough to place 2nd in team sweepstakes in President's II division. Was their performance symbolic of the Eau Claire team? Should two people give a team second place in the nation status?

While it would seem that I am thoroughly opposed to the method used for figuring sweepstakes at NFA it is not true. I strongly agree with the concept of awarding sweepstakes for preliminary rounds. I think awarding points as low as third place may be rewarding mediocrity, however. I am definitely not in favor of the three tiered system of team sweepstakes. It creates

sweepstakes "overkill" where teams with quantity and/or average quality are recognized. This can probably best be proven by scrutinizing the winners in the 1986 national tournament. One school that placed 6th in President's I had NO breaks into out rounds. Four schools that placed in the top 10 sweepstakes had only one person break. Overall, 20 of the 30 schools placing in the top 10 sweepstakes divisions had three or less entries (not people) break to quarters.

Tabulation Methods at the AFA National Tournament

There are three basic differences in the way sweepstakes points are figured at AFA-NIET compared to NFA: 1) sweepstakes points at AFA can only be obtained by advancing to eliminating rounds, 2) point values given at AFA are much smaller than NFA, and 3) sweepstakes awards are only give in one open division. Unlike NFA, AFA only awards team points for individuals who advance to elimination rounds. (It seems to be a contradiction that they do give preliminary round points when figuring the quadrathon speaker awards.) In preliminary rounds the same system is used for awarding speaker points as NFA uses for all sweepstakes compilation. (1st place = 3 points, 2nd place = 2 points, and 3rd place = 1 point.) James Pratt, the first tournament director of NIET, explained the organization's position for giving points only in elimination rounds. He said:

"At AFA-NIET we are trying to establish a threshold of quality. Because of the overall quality of participants attending this tournament advancing to elimination rounds becomes the threshold of quality where points are awarded. The second reason for this policy is that all schools have the same advantage regardless of entry size."

Suzanne Larson, current director of the national tournament, was unable to comment about the philosophy which guided the origination of this procedure but added that she likes the system. She recalls her previous job at Humboldt State University which had a small but good team. She said, "we would never

have been able to compete with large school entries but at AFA-NIET we knew that with a small number of quality kids we had a chance to place in the top ten sweepstakes." Suzanne's philosophy is truer than she could know. Last year three schools that placed in the top ten sweepstakes had three or less competitors. University of New Mexico and the University of Minnesota placed 7th and 9th respectively with only three competitors at the tournament. Gonzaga University placed 10th with only ONE competitor. (Debra Williams place first in Impromptu, and semi-finalist in Extemp and Communication Analysis.) It should be noted that while researching this paper I found an error in AFA tabulation. In the final round of Impromptu Speaking, Debra Williams placed first but was only given one sweepstakes point instead of six. Adding five points to their total gives Gonzaga University 34 points. This moves them into 10th place and moves San Diego State University out of the top ten.

This reflects the basic problem I have with the method used for figuring sweepstakes at AFA-NIET. A few stars can represent a "team." It may indeed show quality but not much depth. Furthermore, it is often the case that the team awards replicate the individual awards. From a coaching perspective, I disagree with the AFA philosophy of giving sweepstakes points only in elimination rounds. I find it extremely difficult to cope with students at the NIET who feel they contributed nothing to the team award. Let me use my own team, for example. Last year we qualified 13 students for the NIET - the largest number in the history of our school. Only six of these students broke into quarterfinals and four advanced to semi-finals. When we ultimately placed third in the nation, seven of the students who had not broken out of preliminary rounds felt they had done nothing to help the team earn that award. Just qualifying for the AFA-NIET is admirable but the current method

of sweepstakes tabulation does not recognize that effort. From an educational standpoint this is difficult to justify.

The second difference in tabulation between AFA and NFA can be found in the point value given for sweepstakes. AFA determines the order each contestant places in all out rounds and then assigns the following points:

1st place in round = 6 points
2nd place in round = 5 points
3rd place in round = 4 points
4th place in round = 3 points
5th place in round = 2 points
6th place in round = 1 point

These point values do not change even for final round placement. James Pratt's argument about"threshold of quality" may be a little overstated here. The four students who break into quarters in Prose (out of the 117 people in the event) and place 6th in their sections will only give their team one sweepstakes point! Not much of an award for such quality I'd say. Because the point system does not increase it also means that a student receives the same amount of points for placing first in quarters as they do for placing first in the entire tournament. I think there should be more of a point graduation for final round placing over quarters and semi-finals. At AFA a student who breaks in an event and places first in their quarter, final, semi-final and ultimately wins the tournament could only earn 18 points. At the 1986 AFA-NIET, Greg Dolph did this in Dramatic Interpretation and Prose. Jim McCafferty did the same in Communication Analysis. Comparatively, NFA gives 12 points just for winning first in the tournament. This low point value for final placement doesn't provide adequate emphasis for final rounds. The slim margin between the other positions also seems problematic. For example, there is only a difference of five points between first and sixth place at AFA but there is a difference of nine points at NFA.

The final difference between AFA and NFA is that AFA has only one division of sweepstakes. Since its inception AFA has only recognized the top ten schools for sweepstakes. It is interesting to note the sheer difference in numbers of awards given by NFA and AFA when the number attending the tournament are virtually equal. NFA gives 30 team awards where AFA gives ten. (It is my understanding that they will be honoring the top 20 schools and individual speakers at the next NIET).

There are no divisions set up for competition during the regular season, why start at Nationals? While I agree that team awards reinforce the educational value of forensics, if there are too many awards they become meaningless.

Conclusion

I believe in the importance of team awards at the national tournaments. In their present state, however, neither represent both the quality and quantity I think the award should symbolize. NFA gives too many awards - case of overkill. Their awards tend to reward quantity and not quality. AFA swings in the other direction and is stingy with points so a "star" or two can boost a team into the top ten sweepstakes. My suggestion is a compromise of these two philosophies. I realize that each of these tournaments operate from differing perspectives and I do not wish to suggest either of them should necessarily change their procedure. However, neither tournament has the answer for a team award that reflects quality and quantity. A system that is equitable for a small superior team and a large, good team would be beneficial.

First, I'd suggest giving one sweepstakes point for first place ballots in preliminary rounds. This would be easy to tabulate and would allow students not advancing to elimination rounds but obviously giving a quality performance a chance to contribute to the team effort. I would also place a cap on the number of entries that could count toward sweepstakes in preliminary rounds. This could be either three or five as done by NFA. I would also suggest giving one point for each person (not entry) competing in the national tournament. I would revamp the points given for quarters and semi-finals so all students receive the same points. Students advancing to final rounds would accumulate more points. I like the NFA point value for finals. (First place receives 18 points, etc.) This differentiates more between the placements than is currently done by AFA. Last, I am in favor of only one division of sweepstakes. I would be in favor of recognizing more than the top ten, however, even if they were not given a trophy at the awards ceremony.

I think the team sweepstakes award is a very valuable award and should be continued at forensic tournaments. Currently, I believe it may be a myth that it reflects a team performance. We need to work to make sweepstakes truly a team award again.